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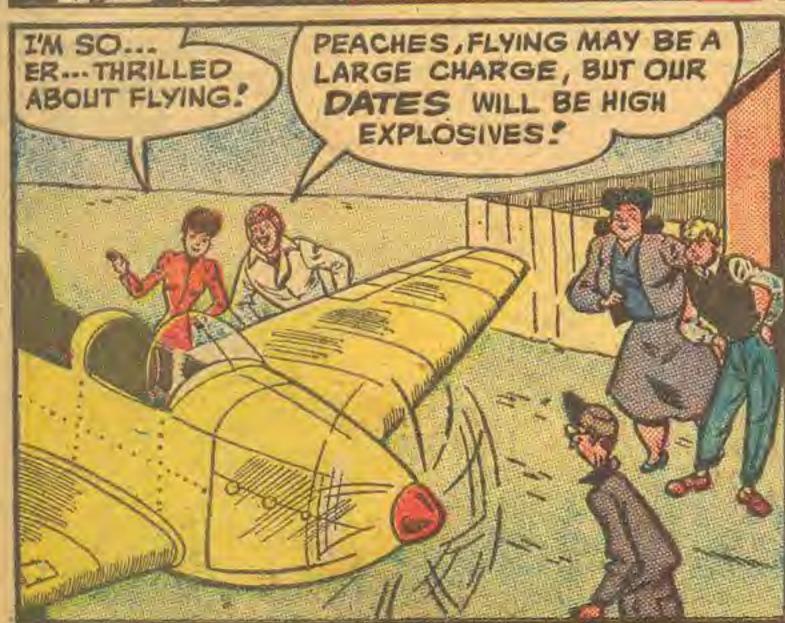










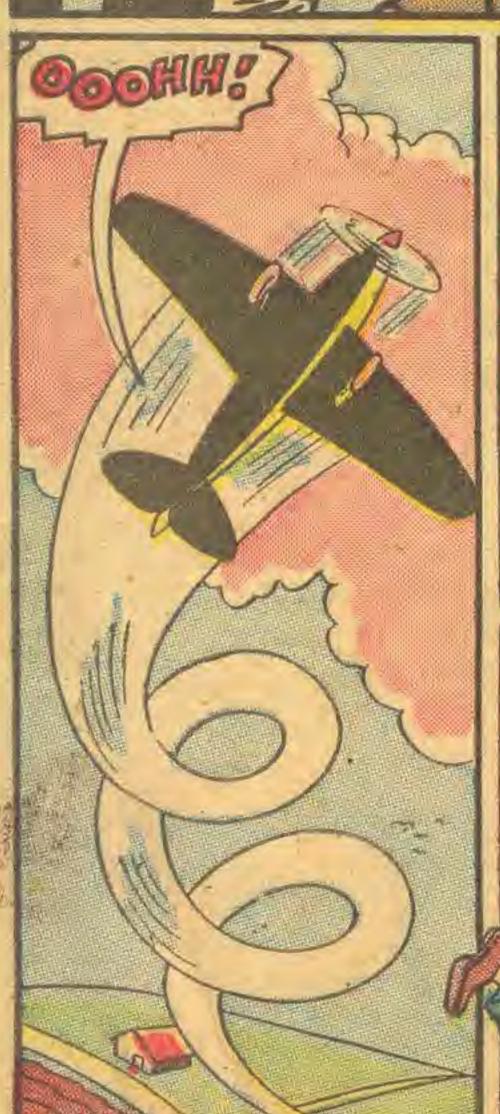


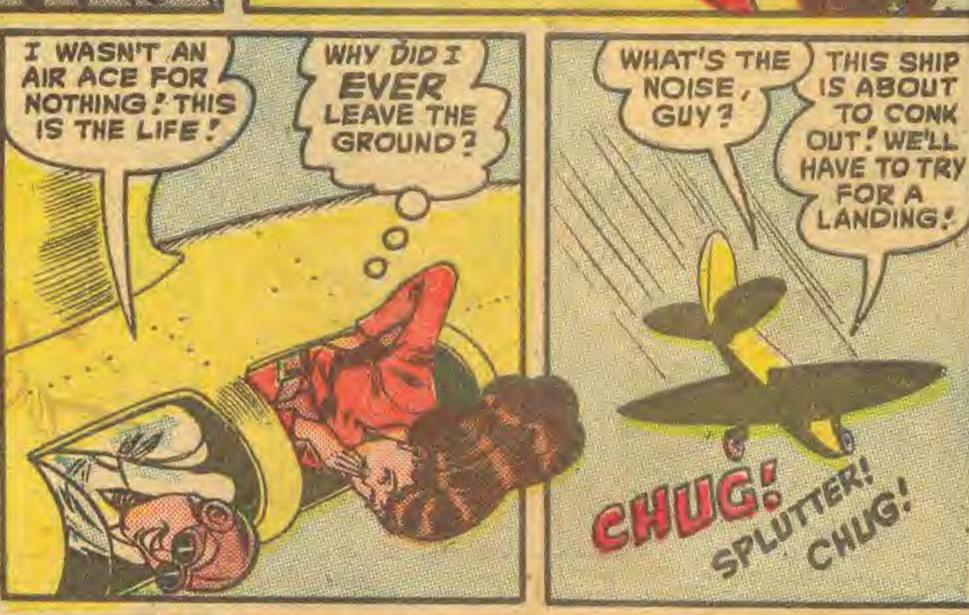


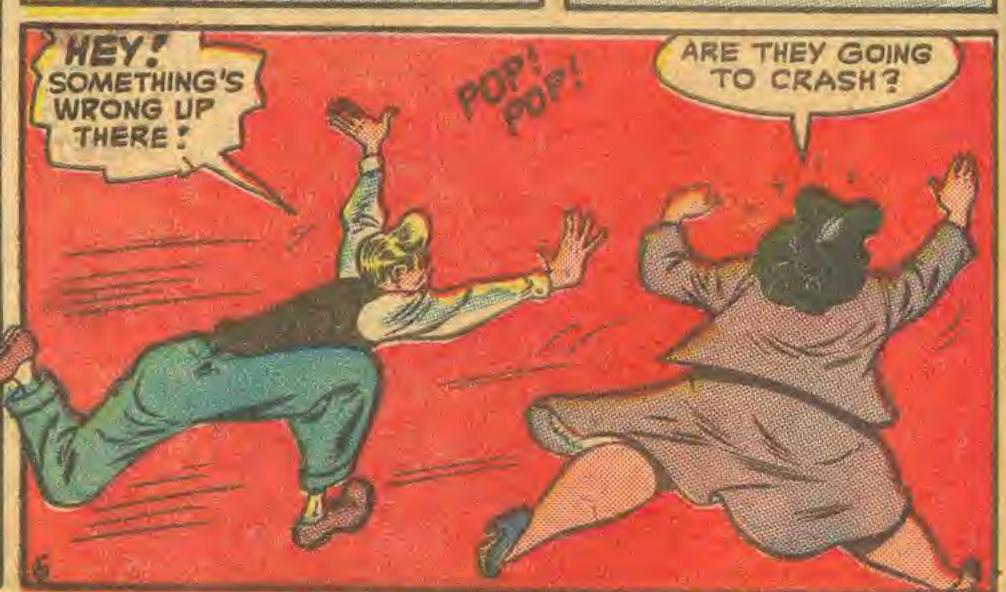






















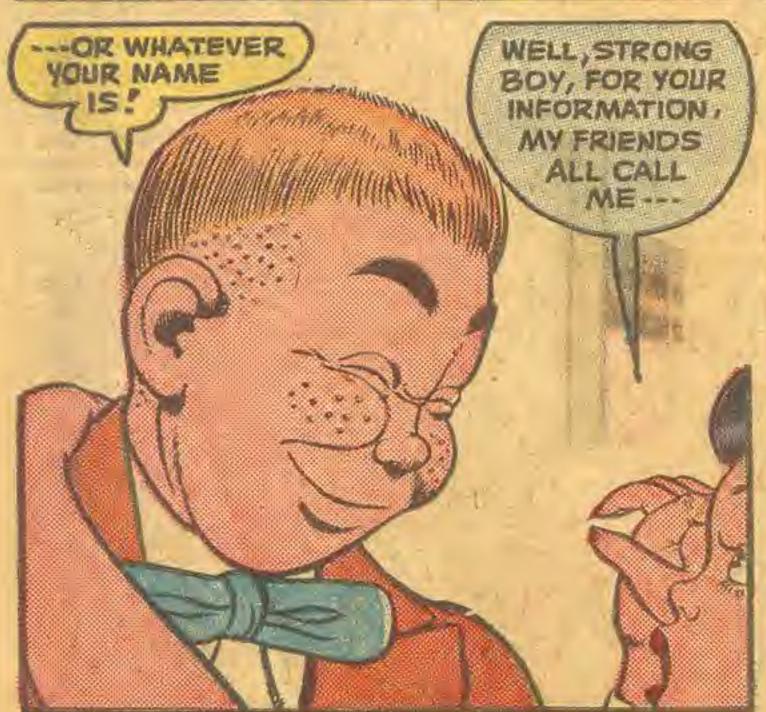












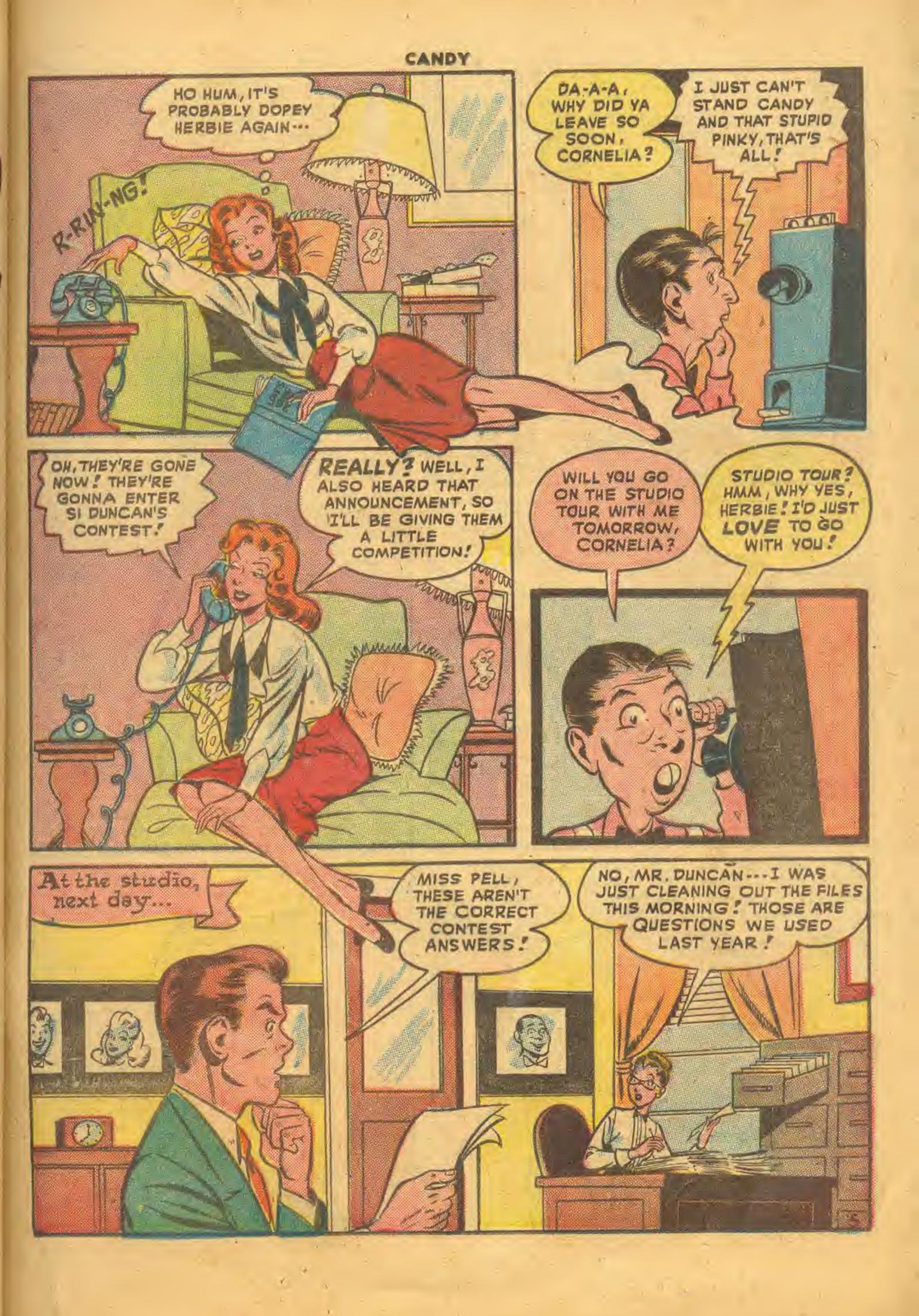


















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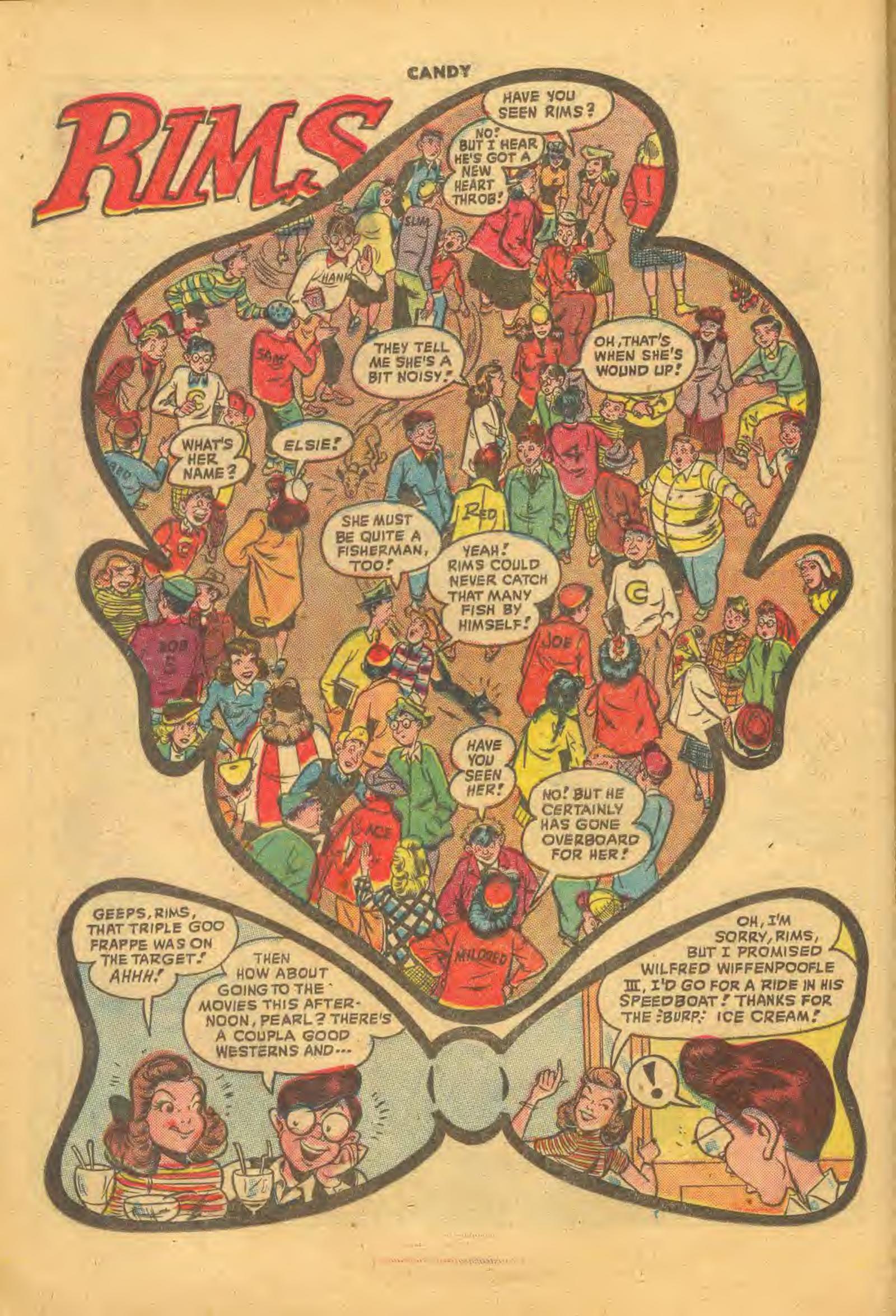
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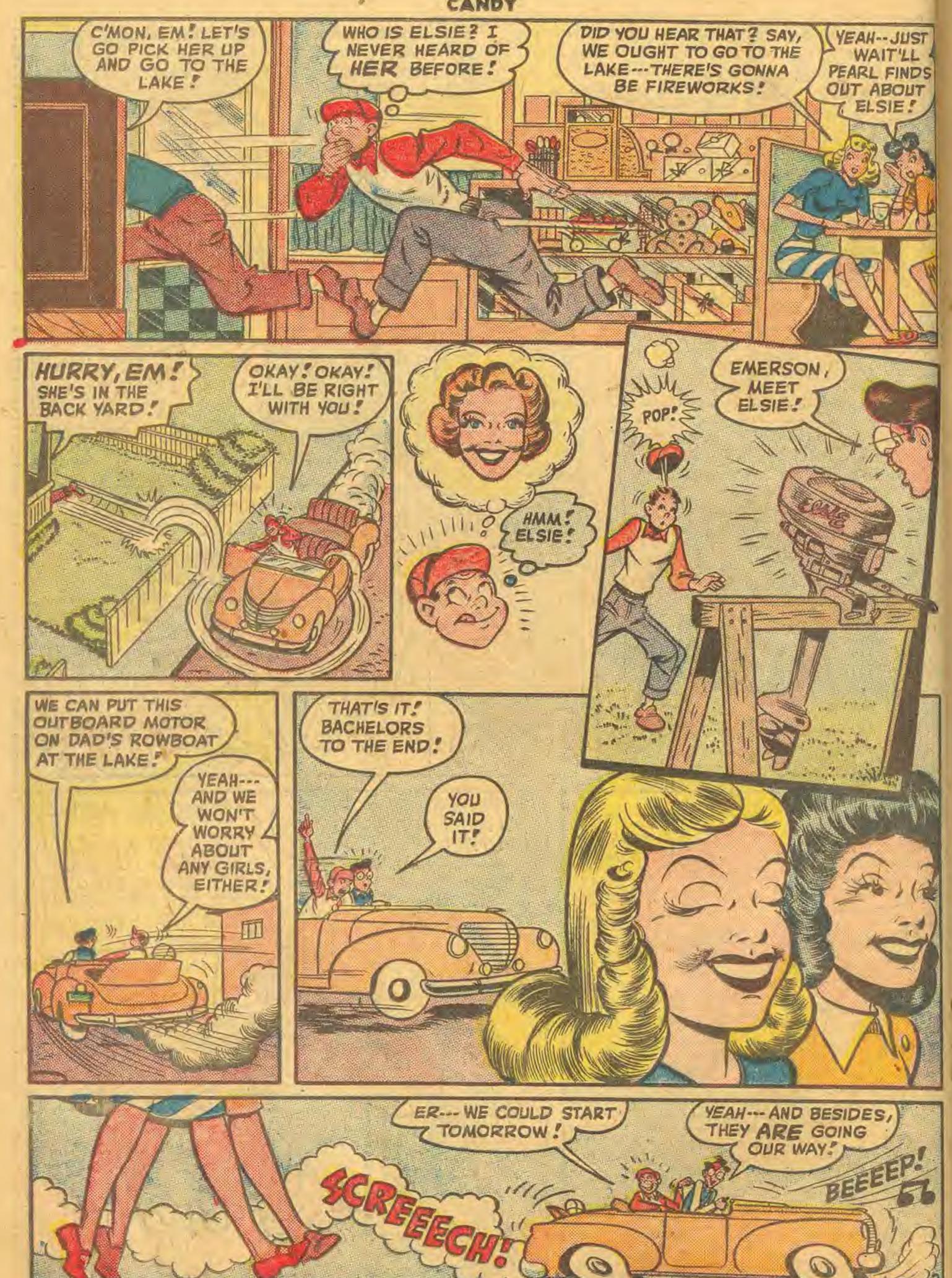












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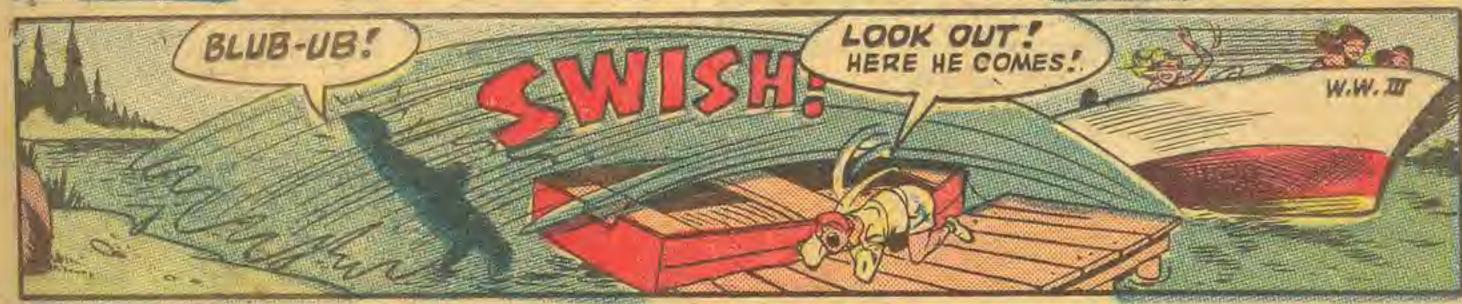
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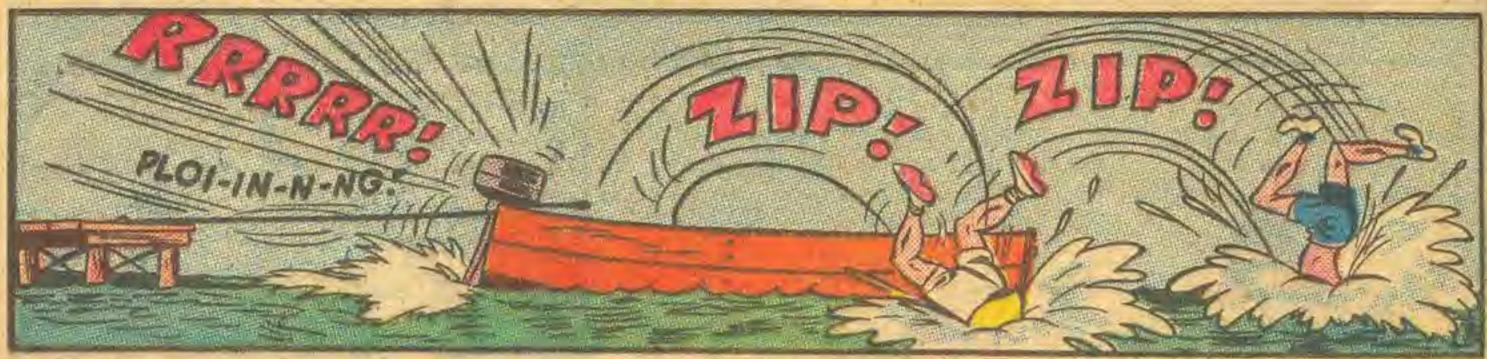




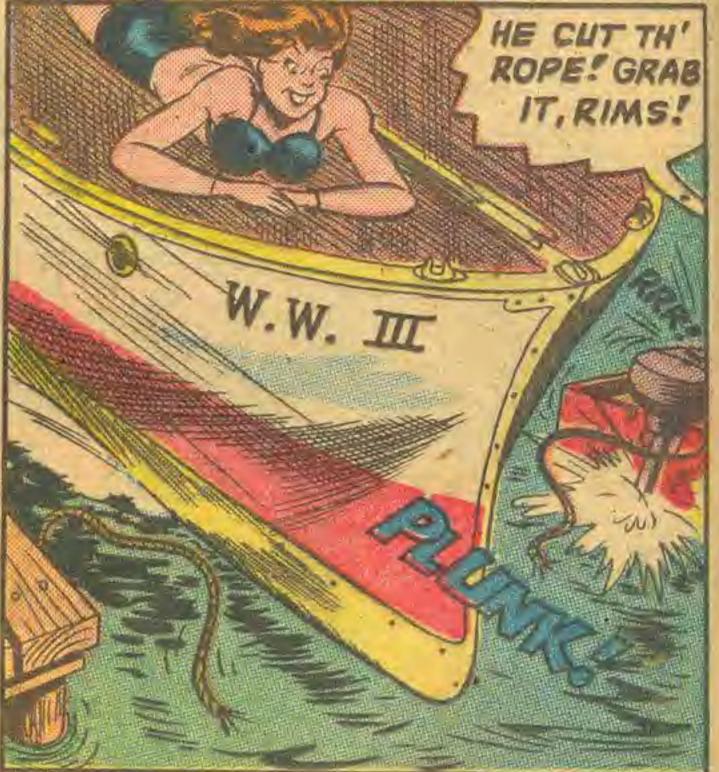
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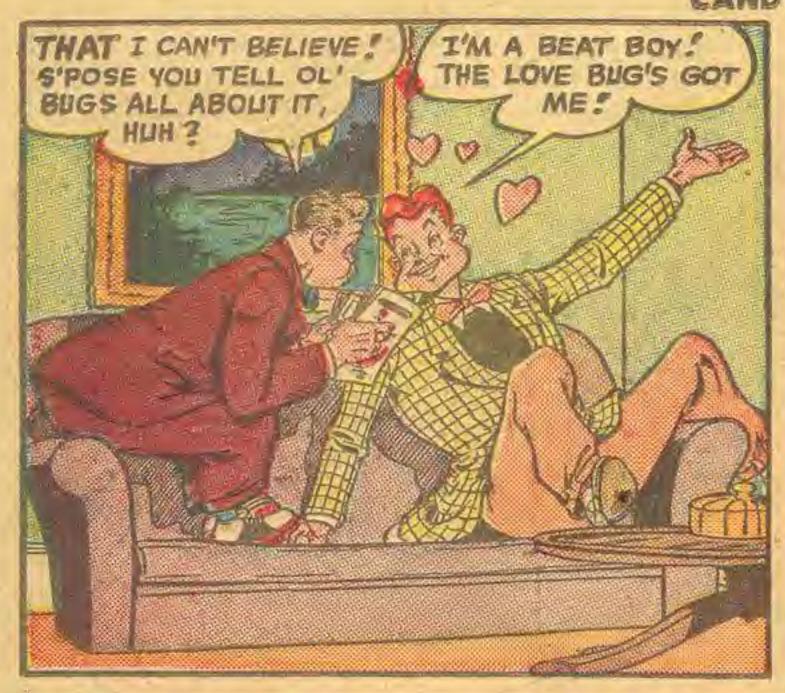
















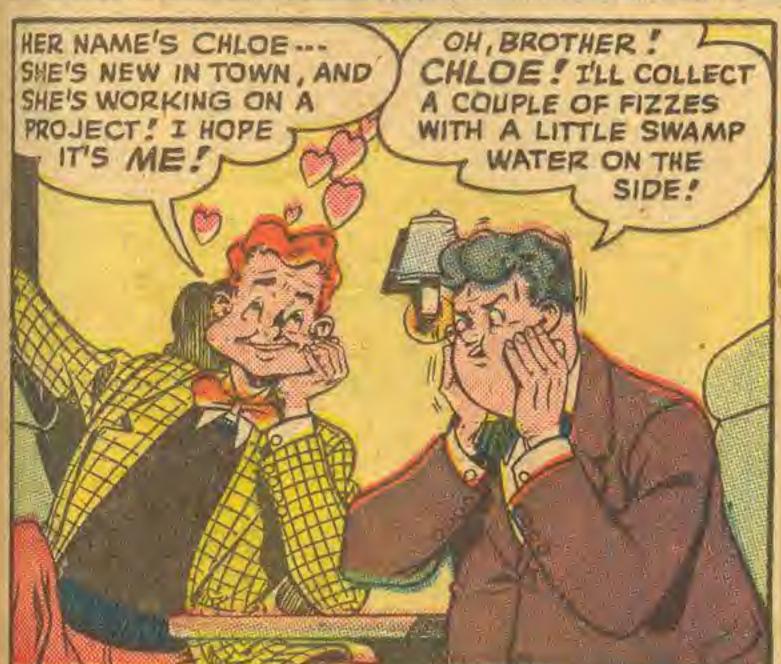


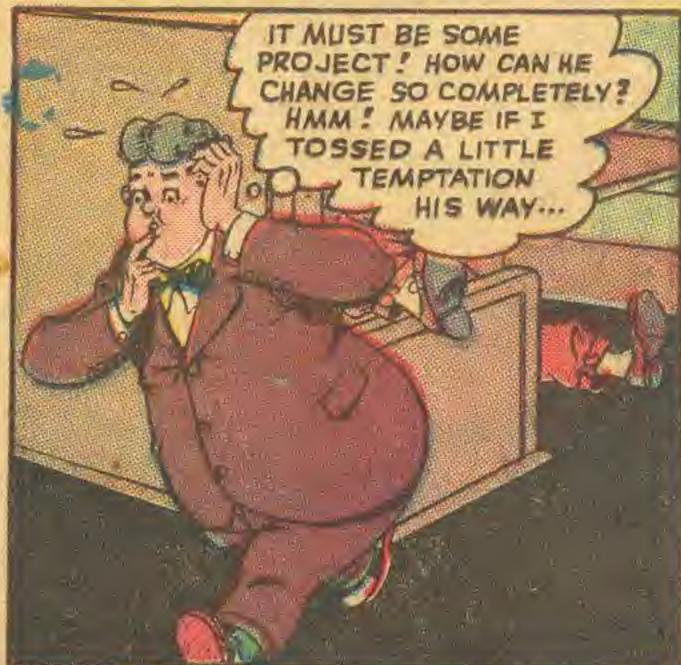












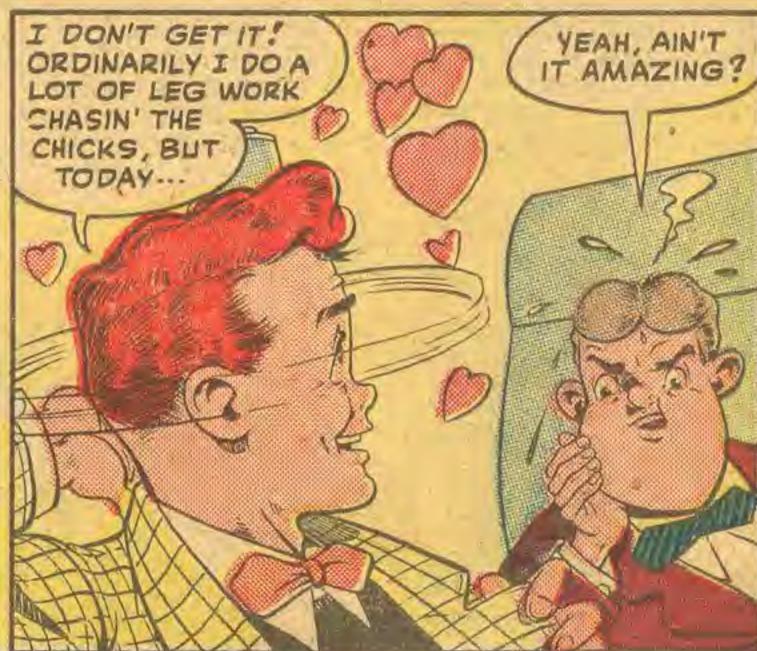
















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## MMM) Wagician

MAGICIAN, mother!" gasped Candy O'Connor. "But that's perfectly wonderful! I must call up Trish this instant and tell her the news!"

Candy ran to the hall telephone while her mother hurried up the stairs. Mrs. O'Connor wasn't at all certain that she had done a wise thing, allowing the tall magician to take their spare room for a week. And this one, who called himself Mardo the Great, was—well, sort of odd. But awfully distinguished!

"Candace!" called Mrs. O'Conn r from the top of the stairs.

Candy hung up the phone and ran up the steps.

"Mother, I'm simply thrilled to death!" she chortled. "Think of it, a real magician in our house!"

Agnes O'Connor made an impatient gesture.
"Yes, I can just see rabbits coming out of everybody's hats!"

Candy chuckled. "Oh, mother! Magicians don't go in for such old-fashioned tricks these days!"

"Perhaps not!" Mrs. O'Connor started down the stairs. "He should be here any moment now, and we'll see."

When the chimes rang, Mrs. O'Connor hurriedly opened the front door. There was nobody there. She glanced across the porch. Then a voice spoke behind her:

"Good afternoon, Mrs. O'Connor!"

She whirled, clutching at her throat. "Oh, my!" she gasped. "W-where d-did you come from?"

"I am Mardo the Great," said the tall young man with the vandyke beard. He bowed over Mrs. O'Connor's hand. "I hope I didn't startle you."

"N-no, of course not, Mr. M-Mardo." -

Candy came rushing down the stairs and halted abruptly before Mardo, who smiled engagingly at her.

By this time Mrs. O'Connor had regained some of her aplomb.

"Mr. Mardo certainly is a magician, Candace," she said. "He simply appeared out of nowhere at the door. Gave me a creepy feeling." She turned to the young magician. "Can you disappear at will, too?"

"Hardly, Mrs. O'Connor," he replied in a soft voice. "Or seldom, at least."

Soon after Mardo went to his room the phone rang. Candy picked up the receiver. The call was from Cornelia Clyde, whom most of the girls in Hartwick referred to as "catty."

Cornelia bubbled over the phone. "Why, Candy, he's simply divine! Can you imagine having a real magician at our house?"

Candy tried not to sound too smug. "We also have a magician at our house-Mardo the Great."

Cornelia gasped, "Mardo the Great! Gee, he's one of the top-notchers, isn't he?"

"Natch," said Candy, grinning. "He's handsome, too."

"Oh, well," said Cornelia, "there are probably plenty of great magicians here for the convention. Tina's folks took in two."

The magicians' convention had never been to Hartwick before; it usually selected a large city. So, to give the magicians an impressive welcome, the mayor decided upon a public reception. He called for several youths of the town to act as ushers. One of the boys chosen was Ted Dawson, Candy's boy friend.

Ted drove to the O'Connor house the evening of the reception. He was angry.

"I tell you I don't want to be an usher," he stormed to Candy. "I've got a date with you."

"But Ted, I'll be there, too."

Ted scowled. "Yeah, I know. With that Mardo guy mooning over you every minute of the evening. I don't like that mug."

Candy laughed. "Oh, silly. WHe only likes me because I'm receptive to thought waves."

"Hunh!" Ted ground his heel into the turf on the lawn. "He's got you hypnotized right now," he said bitterly.

Soon, at the City Auditorium, things got under way. The mayor presented his occult guests and one of the magicians began to do his stuff before a rapt audience.

Ted Dawson seated Candy in the back of the house and went forward to see what he should do next. Backstage, a dozen or more

magicians milled about, readying their apparatus for certain acts. In the group was Mardo the Great. Ted scowled at the young magician, who grinned back in a most friendly manner. Then Mardo wheeled and hurried into the wings. Ted watched as Mardo appeared in the aisle and headed directly toward Candy, seated on the right side of the auditorium. Young Mr. Dawson ground his teeth.

Ted's duties were rather numerous, so he was unable to keep an eye on Mardo and Candy. Two of the other magicians were now going through their routines on the stage, and Ted went on about his business.

Later, while Fiero the Firebrand was putting on his spectacular demonstration of colored fire, someone shouted, "Fire!" The cry came from the wings.

No one thought much of it at first, because the stage was literally covered with varicolored masses of fire-cold fire. Everybody knew that there was no danger from such fire, and even when the shout was repeated several times, there was still no great excitement in the audience.

It was one of the magicians who rushed out on the stage and explained that the fire alarm was really true. He asked that everybody remain seated and keep calm, and assured the audience that there would be no danger.

The stagehands went to work with hoses and extinguishers. People were getting somewhat excited now, and an undercurrent of panic began stirring through the auditorium.

Flames started to lick the wings. Then the big curtain caught and went up in one puff of smoke. Finally the ceiling became a mass of flame.

People were up now, climbing over seats and making for the side exits. Outside a siren screamed. The city fire department was coming. Meanwhile the stage crew tried desperately to chop away debris which blocked the wings.

Mardo the Great stood on the stage begging the audience to keep calm. While he stood thus, a big piece of ceiling sheeting fell beside him with a crash. He hardly gave it a glance.

Now Ted was down among the audience, searching madly for Candy. Where was she? He made his way toward the rear, calling her name every few steps. She didn't answer. Then he thought-Mardo! Undoubtedly the magician had been the last to see her. Ted squeezed back through the milling mob toward the stage again. Maybe Mardo had got Candy out of the auditorium.

When he reached the stage, Ted climbed over the footlights and rushed for the magician, who was still exhorting the crowd to use reason.

"Candy!" he yelled. "Where is she, Mardo?" Mardo looked, blinked. "Candy? . . . Oh, of course. She was back there when I last saw

her." He pointed toward the right side of the hall.

"She's not there now," Ted exclaimed. "I've got to find her!"

Ted turned to dash away, but Mardo grasped him by the coat. "A moment, lad," he cautioned. "You can't find her if you get panicky. Come, we will both look,"

Mardo led the way down off the stage and they elbowed their way toward the right side of the big hall. Flames were crackling everywhere, and the people were yelling and pushing. The exits were crowded as frightened folks stampeded through into the alleys that bordered the sides of the building.

The fire department men came through the street doors with big hoses and chemical equipment. Ted saw them begin chopping at a side door. It wasn't an exit, and he wondered where it led. Finally, the door panels gave and the door flew open. The fireman with the axe leaped through. A cloud of smoke poured out from a small vestibule.

Mardo and Ted followed. They saw flames all around the room. Then they saw the fireman picking a girl up from a couch.

"Candy!" gasped Ted through the smoke.

Then Mardo did a strange thing, He made a few rapid passes with his hands toward the fireman. The latter laid the girl down. Mardo motioned to Ted.

As if in a daze, Ted picked Candy up and started through the door. As soon as they were outside and the air hit her, Candy awoke.

"Oh, Ted," she cried, eyes wide and frightened. "You saved my life. I was scared to death in there. The smoke closed in and I passed out. Gee, it's wonderful to be saved by-you!"

Ted set her on her feet and rubbed his smarting eyes. He was seeing Mardo the Great entirely differently now. It was Mardo who had made this rescue possible. Why had he done it? He had hypnotized the fireman so that he-Ted-could be the hero!

"It was nothing," Ted said humbly, "nothing that I did."

"Why, Ted!" cried Candy. "I think it was the most wonderful thing. . . . "

From a hidden place near by, Mardo the Great smiled at the two youngsters. Sometimes a magician was called upon to perform strange tricks to win his audience.













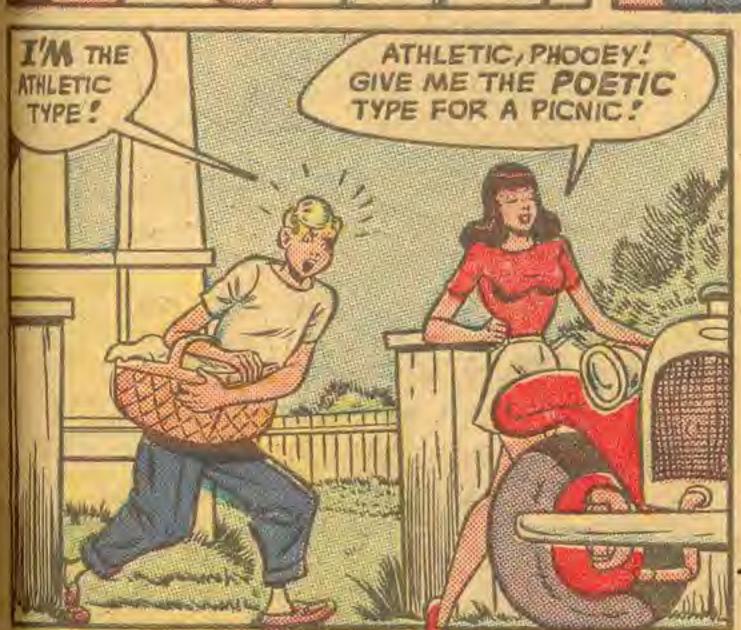




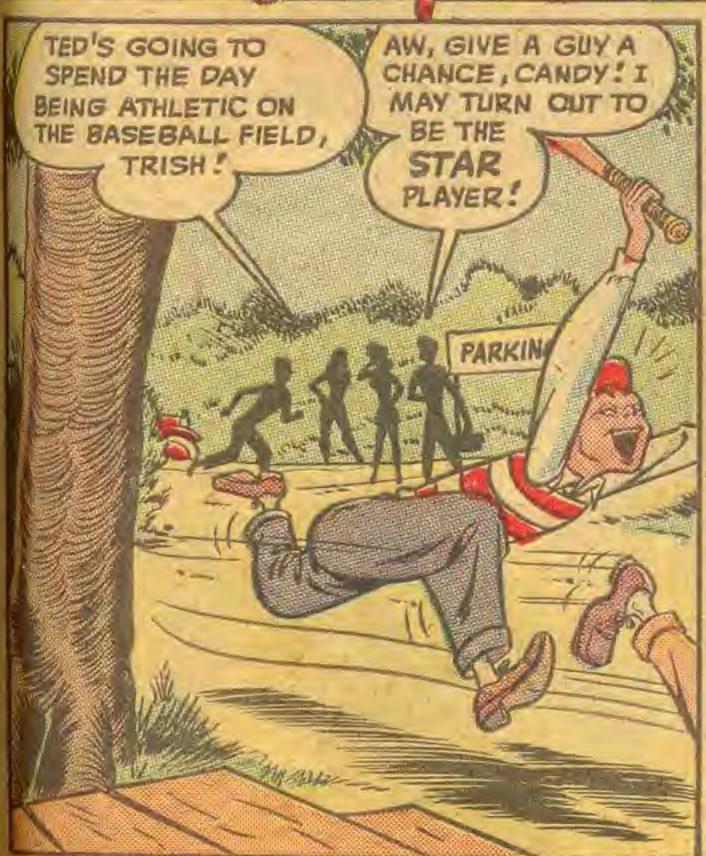


































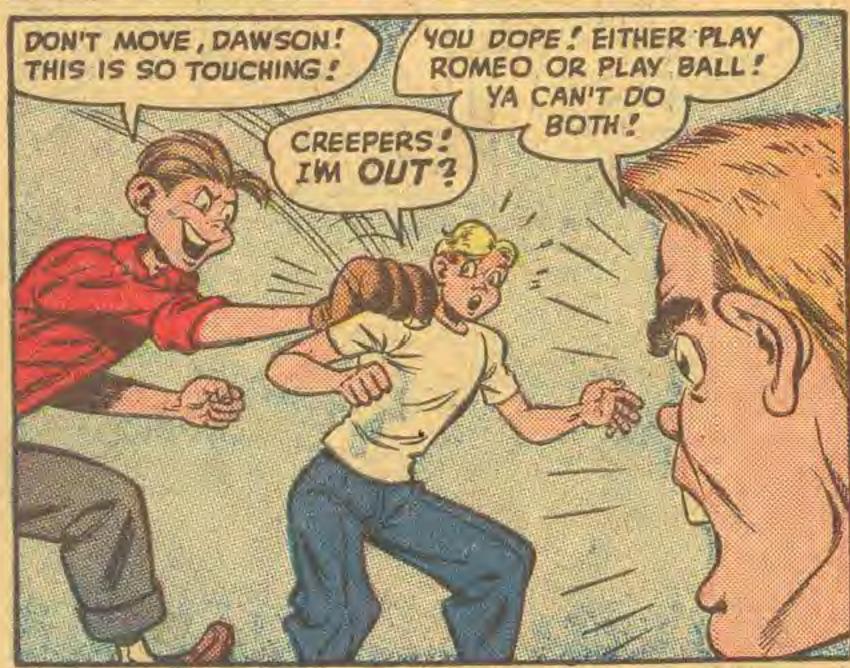




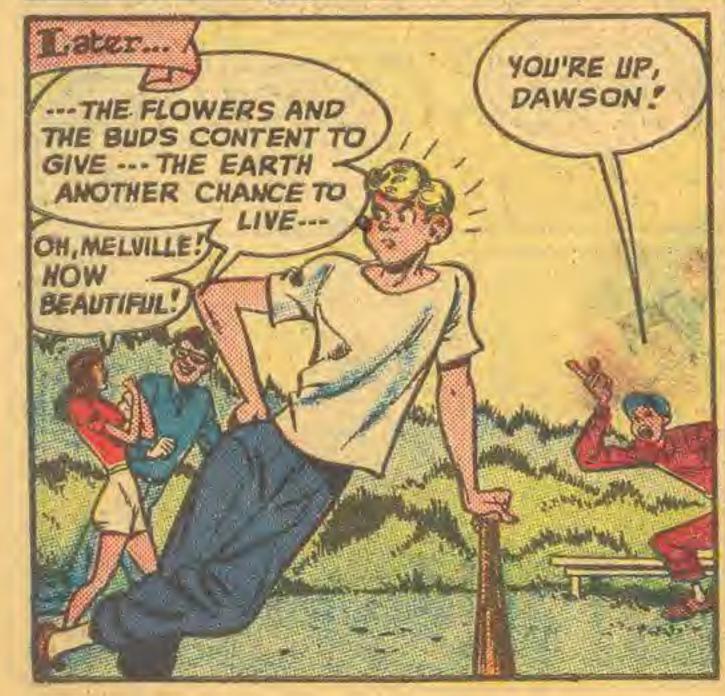
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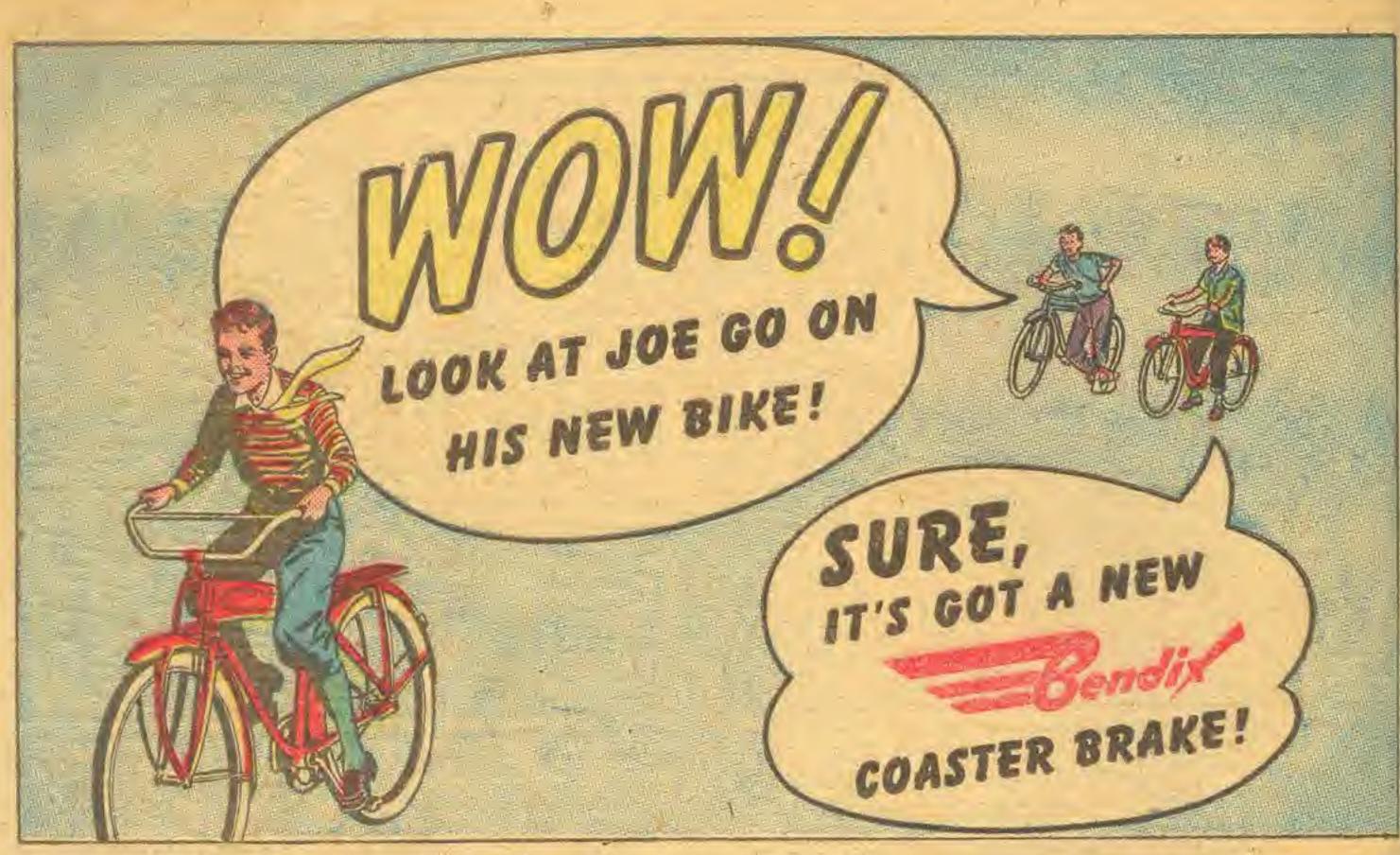
















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